

12. FIFTH MANSION – (iii)

More than a thousand times in my life I heard people asking me how to attain union with God in prayer. Teresa would answer “To be one with God requires a union of wills” (IC V,3,1). It is quite an interesting theme for discussion with people belonging to other religions too. If we were to speak of Hinduism they have many experiences of union like obtaining *jevan mukti*, *moksha*, *samdhi* etc. But when it comes to Christianity we have a quite different connotation to define the soul uniting with God.

Self-Knowledge

Teresa tells her readers that to live in the Fifth Mansions presupposes that a person will always wish to grow in self-knowledge and service to God. There are many examples of people who were called to serve the Lord and enjoy fellowship with him and then became lost through their own carelessness. She insists that the only way to keep this from happening is through unfailing obedience to God's law.

Teresa wishes to be clear: it is impossible to attain the heights of which she has spoken if one has not submitted one's will entirely to God. Growth in the spiritual life is not about having deep experiences of prayer, but of uniting one's will to God's will.

Love is central

One manifests this union by keeping the commandments, the greatest of which are love of God and neighbor. For this reason, it is much more important to help a person in need and to rejoice in the good fortunes of others than remaining absorbed in one's prayerful devotions. One does not grow in holiness by seeking spiritual experiences but by growing in the virtue of love of God and neighbor.

True Union

According to Teresa “true union can very well be reached, with God's help, if we make the effort to obtain it by keeping our wills fixed only on that which is God's will” (IC V,3,iii). Teresa thinks how much we love God by our practice of love of neighbor. Our nature is so corrupt we cannot love our neighbor with any kind of perfection unless this love of neighbor has God as its root. But the only way we can measure our love of God is by our love of neighbor. God so loves this virtue that he will repay our efforts to practice it by increasing in a thousand ways the love we have for him

Certainty of Love

Teresa affirms that while we cannot fully know for certain if we love God, but we can certainly know if we really love our neighbor. She believes that God will increase our love for him when he sees that we love our neighbor. Teresa believes that love of neighbor has its roots in love of God. She says we should not make grandiose plans and then not follow through with deeds in conformity with those plans. We should practice humility and not think we have virtues that we don't have; and that is why “works are what the Lord wants! He desires that if you see a Sister who is sick to whom you can bring some relief, you have compassion for her and not worry about losing this devotion; and that if she is suffering pain, you also feel it; and that, if necessary, you fast so that she might eat – not so much for her sake as because you know it is your Lord's desire” (IC V,3,xi).

Practical Conclusion

Concretely, Teresa recommends her community members to show great concern and love towards those who suffer: “if you see a Sister who is sick to whom you can bring some relief, you have compassion on her and not worry about losing this devotion; and that if she is suffering pain, you also feel it; and that if necessary, you fast so that she might eat . . .” (IC V,3,xi). Moreover she also encourages her members to accept the success of

others: “if you see a person praised, the Lord wants you to be much happier than if you yourself were being praised . . .and when we see some fault in them, it is also a very good thing to be sorry and hide the fault as though it were our own” (IC V,3,xi).

When in a community it is always difficult to do the will of another person. It is always humiliating and painful to do what another wants: “...force your will to do the will of your Sisters in everything even though you may lose your rights; forget your own good for their sakes no matter how much resistance your nature puts up: and, when the occasion arises, strive to accept work yourself so as to relieve your neighbor of it. Don't think it won't cost you anything or that you will find everything done for you. Look at what our Spouse's love cost him; in order to free us from death, he died that most painful death of the cross.” (IC V,3,xii).

She encourages her readers to strive to be faithful even in the smallest matters. She says that it is so easy to have a mistaken notion of one's own spiritual state and that the evil one will go out of his way to stir one's imagination and convince a person that he or she is virtuous and in the state of grace. She gives examples of people who think of themselves one way and act in another. Growth in the spiritual life is not about having deep experiences of prayer, but of uniting one's will to God's.

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